

Carrying on tradition, students build bridges at Marlboro

Chloe Els
Beacon Staff



Photo Jillian Hetherman

Gazing out at Marlboro College for the first time, Maya Abarca remembers seeing white buildings scattered over rolling hills—all of it nearly camouflaged amid a layer of snow.

Unlike Emerson’s campus squeezed into the loud, bustling heart of Boston, the Marlboro campus was silent. It was also empty. In 2020, the school closed due to dwindling enrollment rates. In 2018, only 38 of 92 admitted students attended Marlboro.

Abarca—a senior interdisciplinary major through Emerson’s Marlboro Institute—was one of around 20 Emerson students who spent the night at the Marlboro campus on Nov. 19 during a trip designed to be a bonding opportunity for members of the Marlboro Institute.

On Nov. 6, 2019, President M. Lee Pelton announced that Marlboro College would be merging with Emerson. Through the merger, Marlboro donated its endowment and real estate to Emerson—totaling around \$40 million. Though the school founded in 1946 no longer remains, it lives on through the Marlboro Institute at Emerson, which allows students to craft their own inter-

disciplinary majors, honoring the original mission of Marlboro.

The Marlboro School of Music purchased the Marlboro campus in 2021 for \$2.71 million—a fraction of Emerson’s estimation of the campus’s worth at \$10 million.

Before Marlboro closed, it was tradition for first-year students to spend a week at the beginning of the fall semester hiking, camping, and cooking together as part of a program called Bridges.

Incoming students would spend the last week of August bonding in groups through a series of outdoor activities in the Vermont woods.

According to Marlboro’s website, the students emerged with skills to handle group living and a network of friends to begin the school year. Now, the tradition lives on through Emerson students.

According to first-year interdisciplinary major Juwaria Jama, seniors at Emerson who used to attend Marlboro organized the trip because they wanted to introduce other Emerson students to the college. The trip was originally scheduled to take place before orientation, but was postponed.

On Nov. 19, Emerson students made the two-and-a-half hour drive from Boston to the Marlboro campus in Vermont. They spent the day hiking and the night in a dorm building that was built right before the college closed.

Fiona Brown, a sophomore interdisciplinary major, said that after everyone unpacked, the group embarked on a two-hour hike through the Vermont forest to see a beaver dam.

Both Brown and Abarca recall having to build a bridge out of logs to cross an icy pond during the hike.

“We all had to hold hands as we crossed this makeshift bridge,” Abarca said. “It was this amazing bonding moment.”

Malboro Pg. 3

‘Brutal’ negotiation leads to COLA for staff union

Adri Pray
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Emerson’s staff union ratified their next collective bargaining agreement in a 119-1 vote on Wednesday. The agreement grants a cost-of-living adjustment and retroactive raises, along with diversity, equity, and inclusion measures.

The union’s second-ever contract—forged after more than 35 negotiation sessions spanning 15 months—built upon its first contract, as the union tweaked it to combat “workplace weaknesses” experienced during the pandemic.

Staff members outside of the bargaining committee were exceptionally pleased with how many benefits they won, according to bargaining committee member and Administrative Associate Chair of Communication Sciences and Disorders Estelle Ticktin, who helped present the agreement at a town hall.

“There was only about half our membership [at the town hall] so our task in the next week—we’re holding more lunchtime meetings—is to reach all the people who did not show up yet and hear about everything the contract will be giving us,” she said. “That’s where we need to work next week, so we do have that more than 50% [approval].”

The key benefit in the contract, according to union bargaining

committee member and Network Infrastructure Administrator Steve Bohrer, is the cost-of-living adjustment, which the union fought for during the negotiation. Bohrer believes inflation was a driving factor for the union’s recent win as the Consumer Price Index increased 8.1% in the last year.

“We came up with a few different versions of asking for COLA,” he said. “The final one was the language taken verbatim from the faculty contract and still [the college] fought us hard on that.”

The union also tried to parody the full-time faculty’s compensation clause from their contract, which includes additional raises to base salary. The college didn’t agree, instead offering smaller bonuses, which the union accepted.

Though previously suspended indefinitely due to being in negotiation, retroactive raises were granted to union members and experience requirements will decrease from six months to two months.

The college agreed to a sick bank with expanded eligibility for employees to receive paid time off. The union also altered how Human Resources review staff jobs to hold the department accountable. Now, when a staff member appeals to HR, the department must provide written

Union Pg. 3

‘Bad Axe’ is family business

Ryan Yau
Beacon Staff

Bad Axe, MI, is a town with a population of 3,000, where everyone is friends on Facebook and within two degrees of separation in Walmart.

“Bad Axe” is filmmaker David Siev’s directorial debut, a documentary chronicling his family and their restaurant business in the town of Bad Axe during the COVID lockdown.

“Bad Axe” is not really about Bad Axe, MI. Rather it’s a love letter to his family, people molded by the circumstances of living in the eponymous town.

“I always wanted to share my family’s story, even before the pandemic,” David Siev said in an interview with The Beacon. “In the early days of the pandemic I had a lot of free time on my hands, so I wanted to begin the journey of telling that story.”

The story begins with Chun Siev, who as a young boy escaped the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia and migrated to the U.S. There he met Rachel, a Mexican-American woman, and opened a donut shop. Eventually, the couple rose to a family and a restaurant: Rachel’s.

The eldest daughter, Jaclyn Siev, runs Rachel’s today. Her dynamic with her father plays out as the clashing of two heads in a household, caught between the generational passing-of-the-torch of power.

“Even though my mom is such a force of nature, Jaclyn is the matriarch of the family,” David Siev said. “It’s that weird Asian culture

dynamic of the older sibling being a voice for the other generation.”

David Siev, the only son and filmmaker, normally resides in New York and therefore feels detached from family and restaurant concerns. Nonetheless, he began shooting the movie intent on taking a fly-on-the-wall approach, but that proved impossible due to the conflict of interest. As a result he is unconventionally integrated in the movie and even has direct interactions of his own.

“If you cut every essence of me out of this film, the film lacks intention,” David Siev said. “When the intention is sharing your family’s story, a director should turn the camera around and begin to ask themselves questions.”

The youngest sibling, Raquel Siev, is in her final year of college. She is faced with the dilemma of having ambitions beyond the family business while still wanting to support her family in a trying time.

The Sievs epitomize the American Dream, representing the type of generational scaffolding all immigrant families aim for. It’s a dream in which a man can escape a totalitarian regime and start a family in the land of opportunity, and a family can work their way up from a donut shop to their own restaurant.

The Sievs are also the only Cambodian-Mexican-American family in 2.33 square miles, which makes them outsiders. As such, they exist in the unique area of being highly-visible members of the community without being fully integrated.

The Dream, Pg. 6

Senior spotlights: Men’s soccer seniors guided their team to landmark playoff run with quality leadership

Leo Kagan
Beacon Staff

The Emerson men’s soccer team came extremely close to winning a NEWMAC Championship, but fell to Babson College 1-0 in the finals on Nov. 5, ending not just a strong playoff run, but the careers of the team’s seniors.

The Lions’ crushing final loss came at the tail end of a historic postseason run which included the program’s first ever NEWMAC Finals appearance. Sporting a 3-11-2 record in 2021, the Lions struggled. But in 2022, the team made a full 180, qualifying for the playoffs with a 10-3-6 record and earning its first playoff berth since 2012, when the team still participated in the Great Northeast Athletic Conference (GNAC).

At season’s end, the program was honored with a number of NEWMAC awards, including Coaching Staff of the Year, Rookie of the Year, and three All-Conference selections.

Players are hungry for a return to the postseason next fall, aiming to capture the NEWMAC title they narrowly missed out on. The 2022 season will be remembered not for its shortcomings, but for its successes.

As part of a series of pieces highlighting the success of Emerson’s fall sports clubs—particularly those that came from the hands (or feet) of each team’s seniors—The Beacon interviewed players and the coaching staff from the men’s soccer team to find out why the team’s graduating players will be missed next fall.

Shane Biathrow - Midfielder



Photo Danny Kennedy

Biathrow was a key cog in the Lions’ midfield rotation, particularly after recovering from some early injuries. Head Coach Daniel Toulson said Biathrow’s strengths lie in his ability to move the ball from defense to offense quickly.

“College soccer’s all about transitions,” Toulson said. “He is really good in those, really physical.”

With just three career goals, Biathrow didn’t put together a glowing stat sheet offensively but his cardio and effort levels were a perfect fit for his position.

“He’s one of those players that just does not stop running,” Toulson said. “It doesn’t matter if he’s just lost the ball or just won [it]. All energy, all intensity, which is what you need in the midfield.”

Soccer Pg. 8

INSIDE THIS EDITION

Copley tree lighting marks Christmas in Boston Pg. 3

Massachusetts names state dinosaur, Pg. 3

Grad student receives unexpected scholarship, Pg. 4

The babygirlification of COD’s Ghost, Pg. 6

NEWMAC All-Sportsmanship team announced, Pg. 8

News

Re-building an Eco Corps—the first step to larger sustainability progress on campus

Maeve Lawler
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This semester, Emerson re-established a cross-campus sustainability program, Eco Corps, following the hiring of four eco ambassadors in September and the formation of six working groups in October.

Its relaunch is a key accomplishment of the semester and a step toward reaching carbon neutrality by 2030, said Jennifer Lamy, Emerson’s sustainability manager. Lamy, who assumed her current role in January, joined the college during Eco Corps’ two-year hiatus after her predecessor Cathy Liebowitz resigned in 2020.

“I think the major first step is getting these systems in place to plan and then do the work,” Lamy said. “That’s the place we’ve had the biggest progress so far.”

Having an Eco Corps allowed for various events and projects over the semester, which Lamy sees as a game changer in terms of working toward a more sustainable future.

Student eco ambassadors—Anna Ariaga, Katelyn Koenig, Elizabeth Pereira, and Ava Tribe—worked with Lamy to restart the sustainability blog, host a food fest with farmers who work with Emerson’s dining services, and plan a “clean out your office day” event for faculty and staff.

In addition to an updated blog, the ambassadors worked with Lamy to update other communication channels, like Emerson’s sustainability website, newsletter, and Instagram. Ensuring communication with people interested in sustainability across campus was a major focus this semester.

“The more folks are hearing about these topics, the more likely they are to

engage and take that next step,” Lamy said.

This “next step” means making personal sustainability efforts, like composting and recycling, as well as helping the college in its similar efforts.

Beyond campus, the eco ambassadors took a tour of CORE Waste Management in Charlestown, MA, where Emerson’s compost waste goes.

Koenig, a first-year creative writing major, and Tribe, a sophomore political communications major, also took a trip to the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth for the annual Sustainable Student Leadership Symposium, which showcases notable sustainability projects on college campuses and fosters collaboration between students for future projects.

Beyond the eco ambassador’s work, the six working groups made up of students, staff, and faculty have strengthened Emerson’s Sustainability Action Plan. Each group focuses on different facets of sustainability—like equity and justice or curriculum and research—and aims to have the first draft of the plan in early April. The working groups will then host presentations and hold a public comment period across the college. Lamy hopes the plan will be implemented by summer 2023.

“Once we get through this planning process we’ll be able to define milestones from now until 2030,” she said. “That will give people a pretty good sense of what the next seven years will look like.”

In October, the college received its second consecutive gold STARS rating from the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education, which evaluated Emerson’s sustainability efforts. Gold is the second-highest rating out of five categories.

Lamy is shooting for the highest rating, platinum, on Emerson’s next evaluation.

“That was a great opportunity to see where we are really strong already ... and where [there] are some areas where we can grow,” Lamy said. “One of the takeaways from that was that we needed a more concrete [Sustainability] Action Plan.”

Throughout the semester, Lamy worked with campus services to replace battery bins around campus to ensure students dispose of batteries safely. Additionally, she has allowed students to take up to two reusable containers from the Dining Hall free of charge—a change to the college’s previous \$7 purchase policy.

Before the semester ends, the eco ambassadors and Lamy are planning a campus-wide donation drive from Dec. 7 to 16, where bins will be placed in residence halls for students to donate items before moving off-campus for winter break. These items will be placed in storage over the break in preparation for a student shopping event at the start of the spring semester.

During a dinner at the Dining Hall next week, Lamy and the eco ambassadors will start their “weigh the waste” campaign, where they will weigh food waste from students’ plates and categorize it as edible and inedible. They plan to find answers to what causes food to be thrown away and make students conscious of how much food waste they produce.

The finalized date for the event will be announced in the coming days. The “weigh the waste” campaign will happen another two to three times next semester.

“If people are having to scrape their food waste into a bin on a scale that definitely makes them think twice about,

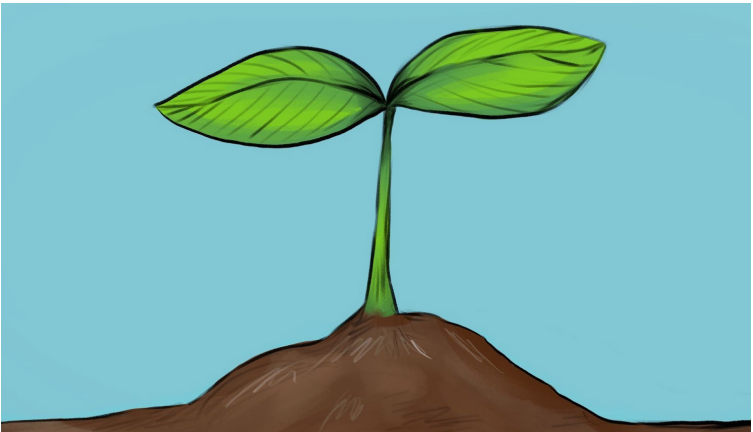


Illustration Rachel Choi

‘Could I have started with one plate and then go on to the second station later?’ Or, ‘Could I have asked for a smaller portion of this, or are the portions too big generally, and is that a larger, systemic thing that we need to think about?’” Lamy said.

Emerson will also participate in the Race to Zero Waste competition in late January—an annual nationwide event that incentivizes waste reduction. More details will be announced at the start of the spring semester.

Leading into next semester, the team plans to revamp the Piano Row terrace area and redesign composting, recycling, and trash signage in the dining hall.

Throughout their semester as eco ambassadors, both Tribe and Koenig noticed where Emerson made progress and where the college fell short. Tribe thinks having a sustainability manager on campus is an integral part of achieving sustainability goals.

“I think having [a] sustainability manager on campus as a full-time role in sustainability at Emerson is huge, be-

cause in the past couple of years, during COVID, we didn’t have a sustainability manager,” Tribe said. “Having paid positions at Emerson strictly for sustainability is a huge step forward.”

Koenig acknowledged the important work the Eco Corps is doing but said participation from students is needed.

“There’s a lot students can be doing, even if it seems pointless,” she said. “Like being one person that people can look at and be like, ‘Hey, they’re trying to compost things in the compost bin and not the trash bin.’”

Over the next several years, Lamy is looking forward to pointing out concrete progress, like reductions in waste and improvements to energy efficiency. She hopes students are involved in this progress.

“I would love for every single student at Emerson to completely understand what’s going on, what these systems are, and how they can get involved. Because this is something that takes much more than just a small staff,” Lamy said.

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Copley Square welcomes in the holiday season with annual tree lighting

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Now that Thanksgiving is over, tree lightings spring up across Boston, including Copley Square’s Christmas tree lighting on Nov. 28.

The square was filled with holiday spirit as families excitedly awaited the illumination of the tree. After nearly three years of living through the COVID-19 pandemic, the ceremony was a sign of normalcy for Allston resident Jeff Schwefel.

“[The] Faneuil Hall [tree lighting] was a little bit different from how it’s been in the past,” Schwefel said. “What we’re experiencing tonight at Copley Square is almost a carbon copy of what it was like before the pandemic.”

While Schwefel reveled in nostalgia, Boston resident Patricia Maria experienced the lighting for the first time, having never seen it decorated for Christmas. She found the square “beautiful” and wishes more events like this could be held throughout the year.

“We can do more things and celebrations like this,” Maria said.

Hosted by Jenny Johnson of Comcast Newsmakers with support from The Friends of Copley



The Copley Square lighting. Photo Ashlyn Wang

Square, Boston Properties, Encore Global, and the Fairmont Copley Plaza, the hour-long event hosted performances from members of the Boston Pops Esplanade Brass Ensemble, Boston gospel singer Aceem Hill, the Boston Children’s Chorus, and Berklee College of Music singer Daniela Gomez.

Before the first act took the stage, Boston police officer Stephen McNulty—who went viral for his acapella “Cop Pool Karaoke” video—performed the national anthem, kicking off an evening of musical performances,

refreshments across the square, and an appearance from Santa Claus.

According to Claus, Christmas in Boston is luxurious compared to his home in the North Pole.

“In the North Pole it’s cold,” he said. “We have bare necessities. But if I’m here, I always get the nicest stage. People are so nice over here, too.”

Despite his appearance in Copley Square, it isn’t Claus’ favorite Boston Christmas tree.

“My favorite tree is the one they sent us from Christmas Island,” Claus said. “It’s from Nova

Scotia.”

Since 1971, Nova Scotia sends Boston a Christmas tree each year as a “thank you” for Boston’s support in the Halifax Explosion in 1917. This tree will be lit on Dec. 1 in the Boston Common.

While Santa might prefer the tree in the Common to Copley Square, Schwefel loves the look of the illuminated square.

“It’s worth coming into the city and standing out in the cold for,” Schwefel said.

The quartet from the brass ensemble opened the event playing arrangements of “Ding Dong Merrily on High,” “Christmas Time is Here,” and “Sleigh Ride.” They also informed listeners that starting Dec. 1, the Boston Pops will start performing at Boston Symphony Hall with brand new material.

“I’d like to say the ink is still wet but that would date me, so let’s say the inkjet is still printing [the music],” said one member of the Pops.

Following the Boston Pops, Hill performed for the second consecutive year at the event, once again performing his renditions of popular Christmas songs.

“I think I did a good job last time and I’m going to try to do a good job this time,” Hill said be-

fore taking the stage.

Hill performed “Hark, the Herald Angels Sing” and “The Christmas Song.” It was during Hill’s performance that prominent feedback and echoing started. Director of Event Technology James Goyette explained how the sound issue came to be and ensured that next year, precautions would be taken to prevent the issue.

“Our sound engineers were adjusting the reverb a lot to give [the audio] that cathedral sound effect,” Goyette said. “That, and feedback from the generator caused the echo.”

The Boston Children’s Chorus performed “Winter Wonderland” and “Spivak” before singer-songwriter Daniela Gomez took the stage, performing “Hallelujah” and “Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas.”

There are plenty more Christmas celebrations to come throughout December. On Dec. 1, the Boston Common lighting will take place followed by the Holiday Lights 2022 Ceremony on the Commonwealth Avenue Mall.

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Staff union gets raises and DEI measures

Cont. from Pg. 1

rationale to that employee and the union regardless of whether the proposal is accepted or rejected.

“That will help us combat bias,” said Illona Yukhayev, union bargaining committee member and instructional technologist. “If you said ‘yes’ to this person and ‘no’ to this person, let’s compare them, let’s see where they were different, where they were similar.”

To ease department understaffing, the union pushed for a staffing committee composed of half staff and half management that will annually audit each department and report its findings. The union hopes publishing these results, like Emerson does for students and faculty, will continue to push DEI measures. However, if the union finds the college is not receptive to the committee’s findings, it can take action—anything short of a strike.

Additionally, if a staff member takes on extra responsibilities in the wake of an employee leaving, they can appeal to the college after 60 days of accepting responsibility to receive more compensation or have those tasks removed.

“Management can say no, because it’s [at] their discretion. The language isn’t as strong as we wish it was,” Yukhayev said. “I think having a process in place allows us to push against management if they don’t give people more money or less work when things like that happen.”

The contract removes limitations on when teaching staff can teach and will pay them separately for classroom sessions starting at the same salary as a step one affiliated faculty member if they



Illustration Hailey Akau

teach a four-credit class. For example, staff members within the Performing Arts department who make costumes and teach costume making will be paid separately for their time inside and outside of the classroom.

The college also committed to improving internal equity language which the union hopes to use as a tool to monitor and enforce compensation standards for new hires. However, the college rejected proposed DEI measures the union felt would improve diversity at the college, specifically regarding job posting requirements.

“You don’t need a Master’s, you don’t even need a Bachelor’s for some jobs, but [Emerson] requires it, and that’s some gatekeeping,” Yukhayev said. “There were things we didn’t get, but we did get things like commitment from the college for training on issues of DEI for the staff.”

Out-of-state staff members who choose to work in Boston previously did not receive the same

state benefits and protections as staff within Massachusetts. Specifically, the union raised the concern that the Supreme Court might redefine what a family is and who is eligible for leave as a family. The college agreed to give out-of-state staff equal recognition in offered benefits even if their state or federal law does not recognize their family.

During the 15-month negotiation, the union utilized multiple social media platforms to ask alumni and students for support to gain traction for their initiatives. Many were more than willing to aid the union.

“I have so many thank-you emails to write because we could not have done it without the support of so many alumni and students and faculty who stood by us,” Yukhayev said. “There are just no words to describe how much of a difference that has made.”

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Students bond on Marlboro trip

Cont. from Pg. 1

After the hike, the group of students spent their evening sitting around a campfire, roasting sausages, and making s’mores. When it was dark, Abarca went stargazing with a few other students—something she’s unable to do in Boston.

“It was really beautiful to be surrounded by nature,” she said.

Despite having been closed for two years, Brown said the campus does not seem to have changed much from how it used to be.

“It’s like a snapshot in time,” Brown said. “Some places may get dilapidated, but not this one.”

Neither Abarca, Brown, or Jama originally attended Marlboro; however, they still connected to it because of Emerson’s preservation of certain aspects of the original college.

Many former Marlboro professors now teach interdisciplinary studies courses at Emerson as part of the Marlboro Institute. Some relocated to Boston, but some still live in Vermont and manage the two-and-a-half hour commute by carpooling.

“After making that long drive all the way up to Vermont,” Abarca said. “It really puts into perspective how much love they have for their students.”

Through the integration of Marlboro into Emerson, students like Abarca, Brown, and Jama are able to combine areas of study and enjoy the supportive tight-knit community Marlboro fostered.

“Because the department is so small, a lot of attention and focus is catered towards us,” Jama said.

The Marlboro Institute has 69 full-time members, making it the second-smallest department at Emerson. It is ahead of the Communication Sciences and Disorders department which has 43 full-time members.

Brown believes the interdisciplinary program opens doorways and allows students to practice problem-solving.

Brown transferred from Pace University in New York City to attend Emerson and join the interdisciplinary program. She is grateful the Marlboro Institute exists at Emerson, but contemplates the differences between Emerson and Marlboro and contemplates how her experience may have differed if she attended Marlboro for its program instead.

“I think I genuinely would have been happy [at Marlboro],” she said.

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The Marlboro campus. Photo Jillian Hetherman

Jurassic Bill: official Massachusetts dinosaur named

Adam Spector
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Massachusetts Gov. Charlie Baker signed a bill making the Podokesaurus holyokensis the state’s official dinosaur in a ceremony at the Museum of Science in October.

State Representative Jack Lewis (D-7th Middlesex), who sponsored the bill, said he thought of the legislation during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“At about 1 a.m., my Googling led me to realize that about 12 states had their own state dinosaurs,” Lewis said in an interview with The Beacon. “I also heard these bills came from classrooms wanting to learn about the legislative process.”

Two dinosaurs were discovered in Massachusetts: Anchisaurus and Podokesaurus holyokensis. To decide which would represent the state, Lewis, in collaboration with several paleontologists, created a poll with facts about each dinosaur. An estimated 35,000 children across the state voted, and the Podokesaurus holyokensis won. Not only did this teach children about the legislative process and the specific dinosaurs,

Lewis said, but it also taught them the impact of voting.

Dr. Noel Heim, a paleontologist and professor of Earth and Climate Sciences at Tufts University, was one of several paleontologists contacted by Lewis for assistance on the proj-

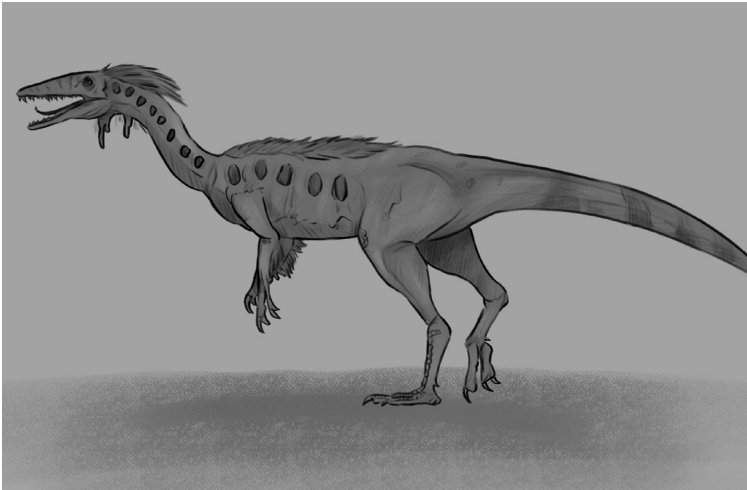


Illustration Rachel Choi

ect. He helped proofread and organize the facts page on the poll.

“I’ve never worked with state legislators, nor have I been asked about what the state dinosaur should be, so

this was a unique experience. It was fun,” Heim said in an interview with The Beacon. “We thought it was fitting to have a dinosaur that was actually discovered in Massachusetts, and luckily there have been two dinosaurs discovered in the state.”

Tim Ritchie, president of the Museum of Science in Boston, views the passing of this bill as more than just an educational opportunity for chil-

dren, but as a sign of a pro-science state government.

“When the Commonwealth of Massachusetts sets aside an entire week for STEM: science, technology, engineering, and math, it’s about problem-solving,” he said at the signing event. “We are in this common place where the general public can meet industry, academia, and government. We have the ability to think about what kind of world we want and what is our place in it. It’s a bill like the official state dinosaur that pulls us together.”

Lt. Gov. Karyn Polito mentioned that museums such as the Museum of Science in Boston help create a sense of discovery and excitement for learning for children and adults.

“The Museum of Science is one of our many partners all across the Commonwealth that we are working with this week to intentionally spotlight what our STEM education opportunities look like here in Massachusetts,” Polito said. “Having this signing ceremony is perfect for us to celebrate what is happening in our classrooms.”

Although this legislation holds little political weight, Lewis still believes it is important.

“While the main purpose of the bill was to help young kids understand how legislation works... [it] also shows people can work together,” Lewis said. “People across geographic and political spectrums can work on legislation that’s supported by the majority of folks across the state.”

While this bill may be mostly ceremonial, it was passed with overwhelming bipartisan support and helped give people something to think about during the height of the pandemic, according to Heim and Lewis.

“This was during a time when people were sick of talking about the pandemic... and instead could talk about something fun... I was getting emails from parents who were excited because their kids were obsessed with dinosaurs, and they could talk to them about the legislative process,” Lewis said. “It’s no mystery that most kids, at one point, loved dinosaurs. What I didn’t expect was how much people needed something to talk about and to get excited about during the hard times.”

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Opinion

The Babygirlification of Ghost in COD is threatening the incels

Rachel Choi
Beacon Staff

Video game franchise “Call of Duty”’s newest installment “Modern Warfare II” was released on Oct. 27, and its revamped visuals and characters have been received positively across the board. However, one unprecedented event has occurred: Tik-Tok’s girly pop communities have gotten ahold of “Call of Duty”’s edgelord Ghost, and all the chronically-online dudebros who rely on Ghost to live out their superhero fantasies are losing their minds.

Ghost is, in its simplest terms, being babygirlified to the highest degree. Many predominantly female communities seem to be drawn to Ghost’s faceless and masked concept, low-toned voice, and general physique, deeming him their “babygirl” to express their fondness for him. From headcanoning him, kicking his legs, and blushing at a compliment to wearing cat ears, Ghost’s menacing persona is being accepted as a cute little quirk to the girls. In response, much of COD’s male fanbase is accusing this mostly-female demographic of babygirlifiers of sexualizing him.

In an ironic twist, Ghost’s babygirlification and subsequent outrage is a perfect segway into addressing the hypocrisy within the overwhelmingly male gaming community. Sure, Ghost might be sexualized to some extent like being drawn in a maid costume, but it’s nowhere near—and nowhere as graphically uncomfortable—as the sexualization and objectification of any female character on screen. It’s about time we acknowledge and scrutinize the oversexualization of female characters in video games, and why it’s a problem to both male and female gamers alike.

The gaming industry has always been male dominated, creating a space where blatant disrespect and sexism against the female minority is expected and encouraged.

The trend continues today. This is most evident in cases like Activision Blizzard, a game maker that was sued in 2021 for workplace harassment fostered by a “frat boy” environment. The case is made more bizarre by the fact that Activision Blizzard is the game maker for the “Call of Duty” franchise. It’s no surprise then that gaming has a “by men for men” attitude in the creation process. There has been a withstanding stereotypical view of female characters: they’re big breasted, sexy, and alluring.

These long-standing standards of industry can help put into context the hypersexualization of female characters that began during the earliest forms of gaming.

Take for instance “Metroid,” an NES game released in 1986. The game follows Samus, a character perceived to be male (even addressed by male pronouns) the entire game. However, it’s revealed Samus is actually a woman. In what was supposed to be a breath of fresh air through the introduction of a female protagonist, this twist is used as a prize. If a player finishes the game under three hours, Samus will be suited in a tight, form-fitting leotard. In under one hour, she will be in a bikini. When Samus was supposedly a man, she was heroic and strong. Yet the moment she is revealed as a woman, she is used as eye candy.

This is a trend throughout history. For example, in 1999 “Resident Evil” special operations agent Jill Valentine wears a thigh-high skirt and tube top that accentuates her breasts.

The most vital part of understanding the problems that stem from hypersexualization of women goes a bit further, however, than simple sexualization. The biggest problem is female characters are not just sexualized, but objectified. As a result, they are usually targets of sexual objectification—their bodies are treated as objects, separated from the actual person and character.

The sexual objectification of fictional female characters directly influences women in real life; it bleeds into societal views of the objectification of women, and these very views of sexual objectification are then internalized. This internalization is

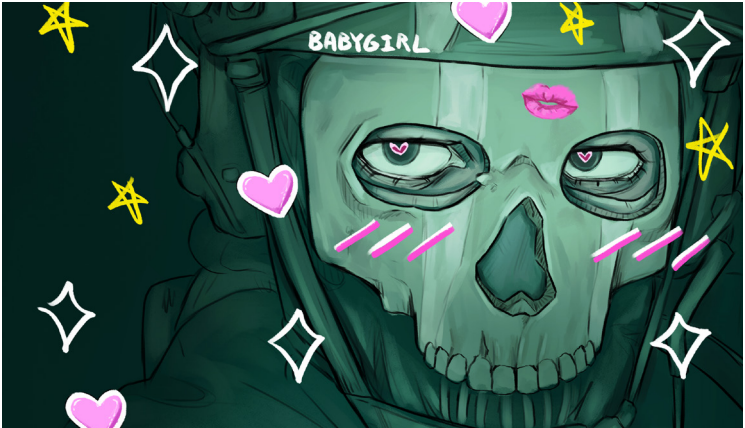


Illustration Rachel Choi

referred to as self-objectification.

Self-objectification has been seen even in women who consider the media’s sexualization of women to be harmless or flattering. Research shows self-objectification often leads to mental health problems such as depression, disordered eating, shame, anxiety, and reduced productivity. The hypersexualization and objectification of female characters is negatively impacting people in real life, yet the problem is still invalidated by the male majority. The fact that Ghost being babygirlified is an issue while most, if not all, video game female characters are uncomfortably sexualized is a testament to this fact.

The sexual objectification of women isn’t just affecting women, it’s affecting men, too—especially adolescents. Men are taught at a young age to be hypermasculine, rejecting any notion of femininity, which plays into deeply internalized sexism, misogyny, and homophobia. This prevents men from expressing or feeling

any emotion that is considered weak; men internalize any moment of vulnerability and weakness as shame. These masculine ideals are exacerbated by teaching young boys that women are objects to be dominated. Consequently, this belief absolves

It also creates an alarming societal viewpoint that encourages men’s compliance and even willingness to commit aggressive sexual acts against women, and even become detached from the suffering that comes from it. Yet, despite all of this, many men still feel ashamed at their objectification of women—and with it comes extremely low self-esteem and knee-deep internalized shame.

This entire fiasco stemming from the babygirlification of a tall, masked man is the perfect time to reflect on society’s problem of perceiving both men and women. Male gamers being angry over Ghost being referred to as a teenage girl’s “little meow meow” and him and Soap cuddling on the couch is a model display of how misogyny, sexism, and homophobia bring an onslaught of hypocrisy that traces back to the very foundations of how many men are raised.

As time progresses, however, there are increasingly diverse casts of characters that display different types of qualities regardless of gender. Take Kratos, from the “God of War” series, originally a buff, rage-filled, Greek deity-killing Spartan, now displaying sadness, grief, loss, tenderness, and love for his deceased family and son—all of these seemingly nonmasculine qualities. Or “Horizon Zero Dawn,” where Aloy displays perseverance, strength, physical competence, and complex character development without running around a post-apocalyptic world with heels and thigh-high skirts accentuating her figure.

It’s well past time for this slow tide of non-stereotypical depictions of characters to become the new trend in gaming. Maybe kids in the future will grow up with more positive depictions of different people, and be assured people are all uniquely great in their own right, without using sexiness or stoicism to prove it.

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“Wednesday” is plagued by the influence of the CW

Ryan Yau
Beacon Staff

The new Addams family spinoff “Wednesday” released last Wednesday.

The eight-part miniseries focuses on a teenaged Wednesday Addams as she transfers to an outcast-only boarding school—“outcast” encompassing werewolves, sirens, and gorgons.

The show takes the famous intellectual property of Charles Addams and places it in a somewhat banal, Harry-Potter-esque boarding school context.

But “Wednesday” is plagued by a far more malicious conceptual demon—the indelible influence of the CW’s schlocky signature style. Wednesday is inexplicably caught in the middle of a small-town murder mystery conspiracy, as if popular TV showrunners have no idea what could propel their stories otherwise.

To borrow a phrase from Obama: let me be clear. I enjoyed “Wednesday.”

It starts with the casting. The 90s Addams Family movies undoubtedly found a lightning-in-a-bottle cast that would be difficult to best, and the 60s sitcom had the power duo of John Astin and Caroline Jones as the famous parents.

Jenna Ortega, as the new eponymous Wednesday, had substantial shoes to fill—it’s not a stretch to say there is no Wednesday Addams without Christina Ricci. In the 60s sitcom, she was a young girl with no discernable personality, as is common with children. Ricci’s performance introduced her signature wry humor that made her a fan favorite, and that has permeated every following iteration.

On top of this legacy, Ortega has the undertaking of protagonism. Despite the odds, she successfully renews the character, providing necessary subtlety to portray Wednesday as a person too caught up in her own characterization to be sincere.

What “Wednesday” does best is interrogate the Addamses in a 21st-century context. Wednesday’s trademark sardonicism and unwillingness to emote may be

cute for a child, but can be annoying with a teenager. Wednesday’s colorful roommate Enid acts as a perfect foil, showing that one can be assertive without pushing people away.

But the show makes sure not to alienate Wednesday from the audience—her wit can be as funny as ever, and it’s always gratifying to watch her interact with snobbish antagonists.

Other aspects of the Addams world were given the same type of reevaluation.

Gomez and Morticia have always been the best characters of the family, and their evergreen relationship was much of the reason why—but what once subverted the archetypal dysfunctional marriage of the 60s sitcom landscape is not so revolutionary today. While openly-loving, hypersexual parents are great fun for an audience, it would be annoying if you were their child in the inward-facing seat of their hearse.

The macabre nature of their interactions is also questioned. Much of the Addams’ shenanigans involve death, violence, or torture—with each iteration of the Addams Family, its members become more openly murderous. What the 60s sitcom could only imply was more explicitly shown in the 90s movies—Wednesday is constantly shown tormenting her brother Pugsley, albeit never in a graphic manner.

“Wednesday” takes the concept further, opening with Wednesday unleashing a pack of piranhas on a group of typical high school bullies, deducting their ball count by one. In the same episode, Gomez is implicated as a murderer—an natural consequence of his love of swordfighting and overprotective romantic nature.

All of these elements work—in fact, the further the Addams’ anachronistic lifestyles stray from modernity, the more entertaining their hijinks.

But looming over the triumphs of “Wednesday” is the shadow of one broadcast television network whose stylistic trappings have suffused the past decade of teen TV—the CW.

To understand the CW’s grasp on pop-

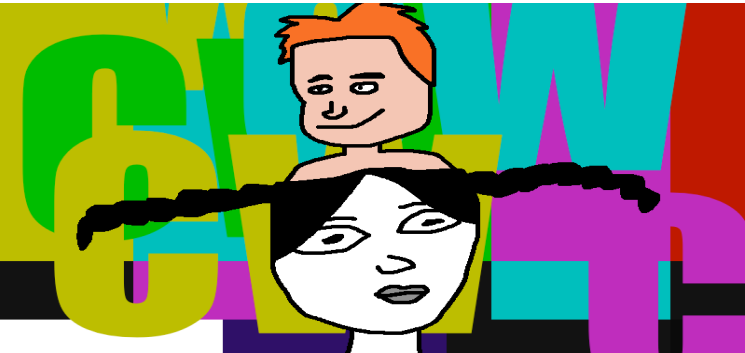


Illustration Ryan Yau

ular culture, we need to talk about Archie. What started as an innocuous all-American comic series about a red-haired boy and his exploits was reanimated in 2017, when Archie and his town of Riverdale were morphed by the CW into “Riverdale,” a sexed-up saga of infidelity and murder.

There was TV before “Riverdale,” and there was TV after “Riverdale.” Even the CW was different before Riverdale. Then the network was more known for its soap adaptations of superhero stories, namely “Arrow,” “The Flash,” and “Supergirl.” Though those pulled on the same tropes of love triangles and twist villains, the specific set of tropes associated with “Riverdale” had not made their way into the showrunning lexicon.

It’s impossible to talk about “Riverdale”—or even all of dramatic serial TV—without mentioning “Twin Peaks.” Often noted as one of the most influential shows of all time, the quasi-soap murder mystery weaved a great ensemble of characters, who were all cheating on each other, around a central compelling murder

mystery, sprinkled with mysticism and cosmic horror. The show simultaneously satirized soap elements, like labyrinthine webs of infidelity, while also fully playing into those tropes.

Season one of “Riverdale” is fascinating because the showrunners seem to genuinely believe they were making the next “Twin Peaks.” All the elements are there, but without any of the finesse.

“All roads on ‘Riverdale’ lead back to ‘Twin Peaks,’ showrunner Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa once said in an interview with *Vulture*.

Even so, there’s an earnestness to the early seasons in its chimeric chasing the tails of “Twin Peaks” that could be construed as admirable. Later seasons, some of which entail the uprisings of multiple cults, abandon any desire to be taken seriously and lean into an ersatz brand of camp.

“The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina,” the CW’s adaptation of “Sabrina the Teenage Witch,” may be a more apt comparison to “Wednesday” as another sitcom-to-miniseries adaptation. It’s marked

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with the same overdramatic tone that washes over “Riverdale,” but manages to retain sincerity for twice as long—two seasons. By the first episode of the third season, the show has incorporated faux-camp musical numbers.

Anyhoo, “Wednesday” seems to find itself at an early stage of adapting CW show traits. The central driving force of the plot is a mystery involving a monster attacking hikers around Wednesday’s new school, and the school and town’s possible involvement in the cover-up.

By nature sitcom characters are designed to be propelled by the plot, and Wednesday as a sitcom relic would be no different. But the flavorless implementation of an overdone murder mystery storyline is somewhat disappointing.

Albeit “Wednesday” makes a point to introduce a larger community of mystical outcasts, and in doing so explores some implications. But the plot somewhat overemphasizes the superheroics of the story, which end up amounting to not much except for generally tedious superpowered battles.

The Addams Family world is rich enough to be entertaining as a more straightforward slice-of-life series—in fact, the central conceit of the family is that they are creepy and kooky in a straight-laced world. With a capable cast to embody the characters, the showrunners had all they needed.

“Wednesday”’s adoption of CW-esque flourishes included to spice up the story are ultimately unnecessary, and forecast negative trends in the landscape of popular TV.

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Pretty Little Liars Original sin, keeping terrible mystery writing alive

Shannon Garrido
Beacon Staff

Trigger Warning: Sexual assault, abuse, murder, and suicide.

A few weeks ago I wrote a column on the 2010 hit show “Pretty Little Liars” and the masterful consistency of its Halloween episodes. Since then I have embarrassingly indulged in the HBO sequel, “Pretty Little Liars: Original Sin,” and it seems the show is making no effort to correct past mistakes.

“PLL: Original Sin” had an incredibly strong start to the season, combining creative and entertaining story lines. However, like its predecessor, the show becomes too convoluted to produce a compelling story and messily ties its strings with bad writing.

The events of the first season take place days before Halloween, and I can say with absolute certainty this is not the Pretty Little Liars we knew. The mystery at hand and the demons the characters face are much more serious. Marlene King, the original showrunner and executive producer for “PLL: Original

“I wish I could make this up, but unfortunately Marlene King still has a flair for the absurd.”

Sin,” is known for glossing over serious topics—such as eating disorders, drugs and alcohol abuse, and predatory relationships.

Through Marlene’s writing, the characters experiencing these hardships are not perceived as victims. Their problems become plot devices used to move the story along instead of developing their characters.

However, “Original Sin” makes no attempt to quickly move on from the trauma its characters endure. Whether they do a good job is up for interpretation.

The main character Imogen is by far the most developed character. She has recently lost her mother to suicide and is pregnant at 16. We find out later in the season that her pregnancy is a result of rape, and she does not know who the father is. Having gone through all this, her character is not hardened or ‘bitchified’ for the sake of television. She is sociable, vulnerable, and is actively trying to make the best out of her very difficult situation.

In the midst of all this, Imogen along with the rest of the crew, Noah, Faran, Tabby, and Mouse, are being blackmailed by an unknown antagonist, ‘A’. ‘A’ attacks them physically several times in the first episodes and threatens to spill all their secrets—and these girls have many.

Noah—recently out of juvie and doing community service—took the fall for her mother’s drug possession. Faran, a self assured ballerina, has a strained relation-

ship with her mother, who puts an immense amount of pressure on her. We later find her mother paid for an unrecommended surgery to straighten Faran’s spine at the age of six due to scoliosis, which left her traumatized and in pain.

Tabby, an obsessed film buff, deals with the trauma of being sexual assaulted by an unknown assailant. She makes many attempts to find her attacker by hiding a camera in the boys changing room and listening in to their conversations. Marlene and her writers justify this behavior as some form of investigative journalism, even though this is assault as well—indicative of how lazy their character writing is.

Finally we have shy and tech savvy Mouse, whose backstory is not really clear. All we know is that in an attempt to find her father, she meets with men who have lost children and pretends to be their child for a few hours. I wish I could make this up, but unfortunately Marlene King still has a flair for the absurd.

The show adequately allows the girls’ secrets to spill gradually. We are not aware of them right off the bat, but find out the closer the girls get to cornering ‘A.’ The problem is that mystery cannot be built just through revelations. Writers should not simply introduce new characters to fill plot devices, and they cannot suddenly decide a character is the villain just because no one would suspect them.

The whole point of a mystery is the challenge of solving it. The clues are in plain sight and the audience should have some chance of figuring it out. A good writer would hide those clues well enough that even in plain sight the audience cannot solve the mystery. The original show made this same mistake by parading a bunch of very plausible suspects in front of the viewer and then going for... the road less traveled.

In the original show, ‘A’ is a mysterious entity who sends threatening texts and leaves beheaded dolls in the girls’ lockers. ‘A’ is a ‘mean gir’.’ The threats always carry a snarky and immature tone, referring back to examples like “Lucky you, Aria! Other girls have to do their homework. You get to do the teacher. –A”.

This new ‘A’ is semi-introduced from the get-go. I say semi, because what we see is a giant Michael Myers type, with no eyes and stitches all over its face following the girls around with a knife—yes, you heard correctly.

‘A’ is not some social outcast like Mona in the original. ‘A’ is a full on slasher-movie serial killer giant burlap baby, that—respectfully—scared the living shit out of me. However, because the figure has no face, we still don’t know who it is.

“Having a pregnant 16-year-old girl escape her serial killer principal, only to have his giant, faceless, burlap son go after her is fun.”

Seems compelling enough, but the reveal of the masked killer, not so much.

During the first three episodes the girls chase their prime subject, Karen. However, clues also indicate that the girls’ mothers might know more about this ‘A’.

Karen, the school bully that perfectly encapsulates the 90s blonde bitch trope, is eliminated as a subject when she is brutally murdered by ‘A’ at the school dance, leaving the moms to be the only connection

to ‘A’s motives.

This is when things get murky. The audience discovers that over the course of the first season, these girls have uncovered the long-buried mystery of Angela Waters. This takes the audience back to 1999, where the main characters’ mothers were in high school. Angela was assaulted by Tom Beasley—town sheriff, local sleazeball and Karen’s father—who happened to be dating Imogen’s mother Davie at the time.

After Angela accuses Tom, Davie turns on her and encourages the other girls to do so as well. They bully Angela relentlessly, the worst being Davie convincing the entire school to pretend Angela doesn’t exist, silencing her amidst her accusations against Tom. Erasing her.

This, along with dealing with an abusive and mentally ill mother, drives Angela to commit suicide at a Y2K-themed rave, so everyone would finally pay attention to her. It’s brutal and horrific, definitely a motivation for ‘A’ to make these mothers, and their kids, suffer. Definitely a motivation to torture their kids. In the case of Imogen’s mother, the guilt became too much and a single threat from ‘A’ led to her suicide.

However, as these clues continue to pile up, the same questions are circling. Who would take revenge for Angela? Imogen spearheads the case. At 16 and pregnant, she is doing more extensive investigative work than the actual sheriff—who is busy cheating on his wife with high school boys.

Imogen discovers Angela’s mother was mentally ill and that the father is estranged. There are not given clues as to who the father could be but there is a clear indication he could be the culprit. After this is revealed, the show becomes less compelling because there are virtually no clues to tie in suspects. None of the leading men on the show are perceived to have any connection with Angela other than being in the show.

At the end it is revealed that ‘A’ is actually... the school principal. Yes, you heard me... the principal.

In the very last episode, the killer and his entire backstory is revealed. A backstory that was given no indication through the entirety

of the season. Imogen was doing all that work for nothing—and still pregnant.

The principal is the killer and Angela’s father. However, he is not the faceless Michael Myers, that would be his hidden and abused son. Angela’s mother kept him in a cage and abused him for years, because according to his father “he has a face only a mother could love.”

Sure.

What made this reveal particularly insulting is how terrible his plan actually is. After using his ugly son to stalk, scare and attack the girls—and also kill random side characters—his endgame was to kill them all and frame Tom. How, you may ask? No clue since Tom was stabbed by his wife and he planned to kill them—the five girls and their mothers—in the school gym. With HIS gun. Where HE works.

Don’t get me wrong, cheap thrills and high stakes will get you far. Having a pregnant 16-year-old girl escape her serial killer principal, only to have his giant, faceless, burlap son go after her is fun. Immediately after she stabs the killer, her water breaks. Personally, I lived.

However, those cheap thrills border on tacky when you can’t tie your main story together and hype the audience for a crazy reveal that amounts to nothing special. Not to mention adding the very extensive traumas these girls seem to be working through only to create more drama is exploitative and adds nothing to the main story. The story is heavily saturated with little payoff.

“Pretty Little Liars: Original Sin” had the opportunity to stray from the mediocre storytelling that plagued the original. Yet Marlene King continues to revert to old habits by making the audience jump through hoops of convoluted storylines, unsolved and unnecessary murders, and poor character development, only to provide no payoff at the climax. There is a lack of respect for the audience’s comprehension skills that ultimately lumps the show in with other mediocre teen dramas.

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Courtesy Creative Commons

Living Arts

Emerson graduate student receives first Harlequin Diverse Voices scholarship

Ryan Yau
Beacon Staff

Some people yearn for scholarships. For others, scholarships fall in their laps.

Graduate student Ying Gao is the first recipient of the Harlequin Diverse Voices scholarship for Emerson College's Popular Fiction Writing and Publishing MFA. The scholarship is a new collaboration between Emerson and Harlequin Enterprises, one of the largest romance publishing companies in the world.

The scholarship benefits students applying to the Popular Fiction Writing and Publishing MFA program. Program faculty from Emerson independently choose a recipient from an underrepresented community to award \$2,000.

"Gao, in addition to being a fluid and compelling storyteller of great depth, best represents the goals and ideals of this scholarship," said an anonymous faculty reviewer in a statement to The Beacon.

The scholarship came as a big surprise for Gao, who was not aware of its existence until she received it.

"One day they sent me an email saying 'congratulations, you get this scholarship,'" she said. "I hadn't even heard of this scholarship."

Gao currently resides in Minnesota, whence she attends online classes. She previously lived in Chi-

na, but moved to the U.S. in 2014 to pursue greater opportunities in her writing career.

Gao had for a long time been interested in writing. She traces it to when her village gained access to TV.

In 1993, the most popular show in her village was "New Legend of Madame Snake," a serialized adaptation of the Chinese folk legend "Legend of the White Snake."

"My uncle in the city gave his secondhand black-and-white TV to my uncle in the village," Gao said. "The whole village of people would run to my uncle's house to watch that TV show."

As Gao recalls, the TV show revolves around a snake who was saved by a cowboy. 70 years later, the snake transforms into a woman and marries the cowboy in an act of gratitude. Later, however, a monk captures the woman and holds her in a tower. The show's creative narrative inspired Gao's love of storytelling.

"I imagined myself to be a hero in the story to save that poor woman, and I imagined myself having magic to fight that monk," she said. "I hoped to write down all these scenes."

She began writing in Chinese at 17, and the hobby quickly became a side gig. She took an independent path towards a writing career, uploading her writing on Zhulang, a popular online publishing platform

in China. Back then, however, her stories received little traction.

"I think I posted four or five novels on a Chinese website, but none were successful," Gao said.

Furthermore, China has a notoriously strict censorship regime, so she felt she was unable to freely tackle social issues.

"When I decide to write in Chinese, I just write entertainment, I just imagine things," she said. "In English, I would tell the stories about what happened in my hometown."

It was a fairly long journey for Gao to learn English as a non-native speaker. She was taught English in middle school, though the education was not comprehensive.

"What I learned was from my teachers, and my teachers were not professionals, so their pronunciation was strange," she said. "What we paid attention to was grammar and writing, so our listening and speaking were not good."

After middle school, she was admitted into teacher's training school, but they offered no English teaching courses. In 2003, she went to college in China to learn English, and taught English at a Chinese elementary school.

Gao currently teaches Chinese at a Minnesota elementary school. When she moved to the U.S. in 2014, she went to community college, then transferred to the University of Minnesota. In September of 2022, she



Courtesy Ying Gao

began her program at Emerson.

So far, she finds the program beneficial. Her classes involve a workshop course and a romance approaches course. Much of the classes involve workshopping with other students, where she receives feedback on her manuscripts.

Along with her teaching job, Gao concurrently is drafting five novels.

She's interested in writing various genres, but romance is her primary interest.

With the advent of her MFA degree in Popular Fiction Writing and Publishing, she plans to solidify a career in the writing or publishing industries.

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The Cambodian-Mexican-American Dream



Cont. from Pg. 1

"Bad Axe" documents the Sievs' family business as they grapple with economic and racial tensions during the pandemic. The town of Bad Axe is a microcosm of rural America, and much of the movie's conflict stems from the town's resistance against social change.

Against the backdrop of the 2020 election, Rachel's is faced with a conundrum: they want to take a stand against Trumpism, but many of their regulars are Trump supporters. To do so may be too much for the restaurant financially—especially on top of COVID losses.

Rachel's further alienates customers by siding with the Black Lives Matter movement, and even announcing the documentary loses them business. David Siev drops the "Bad Axe" trailer on Kickstarter to raise funds, but receives backlash for choosing to interrogate unfavorable qualities of the town.

"Some members of the community felt like it was portraying Bad Axe in a negative light," he said. "That was never my intention."

The central conflict of the movie is in finding a balance between standing up for justice and fostering business and protecting personal safety.

Some familial dispute revolves around the parents' decision to continue coming in to work, which Jaclyn believes puts them at risk of contracting COVID. Conversely, Jaclyn's decision to participate in protests is protested by the parents, who believe it would be unsafe for her and detrimental for restaurant sales.

It does manifest in danger—in the movie's most dramatic storyline, the Sievs encounter a group of neo-Nazis at a protest, who later harass members of the family.

The family even interrogates the very presence of the camera and the creation of the documentary. In one scene, mother notes that since David Siev lives in New York, he has less stakes in matters of family business, whereas the rest of the family would have to face the backlash head-on in Michigan.

"She's absolutely right," David Siev

said. "I get to go back to New York at the end of the day, but my mom's the one who has to greet every customer that walks in the door. She's the one who has to put up with those consequences."

While showcasing the extremes of Trumpism and neo-Nazism within Bad Axe, the movie advocates small-scale efforts to fight polarization through reaching out to those close enough to help. One of Rachel's employees was a former Trump supporter, whom the Sievs helped to distance from hateful rhetoric.

The documentary's purpose is to open minds, and David Siev considers it a success. At the first screening of the movie in Bad Axe, many of those who were initially skeptical showed up. Overwhelmingly, they were swayed.

"Pretty much every single one of those people came up to me or my mom or my sister after the film and said sorry," David Siev said. "Seeing those individuals open up their minds and hearts to my family's story was so important. They stopped looking at us as

being the other side and started looking at us as the family that owns Rachel's."

Though much of the conflict of the story is driven by political turmoil, much of the movie encompasses the everyday—joyful times, mundane times, all the bubbling tensions that can arise in a family forced to live together.

"That's all part of what we went through as a country, as Americans," David Siev said. "You're just seeing it through this very specific lens of the Siev family and the people living in this rural town of Bad Axe, Michigan."

The easiest critique of "Bad Axe" is that it's messy. It sprawls and covers every social issue under the sun, no doubt the outcome of condensing over 300 hours of footage into a 101-minute runtime.

But even with so much raw material to refine, David Siev was adamant about not sugarcoating his family and made sure to depict them as rounded characters. As a result, the movie is an accurate—if by nature abridged—encapsulation of a family during lockdown.

Many moments carry no thematic ramifications but add to the texture of the world, such as Raquel Siev's graduation from online college or Chun Siev teaching his son and sons-in-law to shoot guns. Such moments best characterize the Sievs as people, allowing viewers to recognize themselves or their own family in the subjects of the documentary.

"I was following everyone with a camera for no reason other than just, wow, this is an interesting time," he said. "I want these memories to hold onto for better or for worse."

"Bad Axe" is David Siev's passion project born out of his love for his family and propelled by his boredom. But there was a long road ahead for the movie to get released.

It was difficult getting a studio to back him—he was a first-time filmmaker, and the project was inextricably personal, which executives thought would not be profitable. Through a tedious grant essay writing process, he received funding from the Ford Foundation, which snowballed into support from other organizations.

But after getting the movie financed, there was still the question of distribution.

It was imperative for David Siev to sell his passion project. The week of the documentary's South by Southwest premiere, he had \$100 in his bank account and all his credit cards maxed. Fortunately, IFC Films made an offer on the movie a day after its premiere. Today, "Bad Axe" is now available to rent or buy on iTunes.

"I went broke doing this film, and I was totally okay with that," he said. "For me, it was about telling our story and having something that can be passed down from generation to generation, something I could share with my own kids one day."

"Bad Axe" serves not only as David Siev's love letter to his family, but as an investment for his family legacy to come. The footage he captured is an indispensable time capsule—one for the whole world to see.

"This is my American Dream, and I don't take any of it for granted," he said. "I'm just so thankful that a film I did for myself and my family seems to be so universal. People are really resonating with it and that's so special."

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Superstar teaches self-love in “Love, Lizzo” documentary

Clara Faulkner
Beacon Correspondent

“Love, Lizzo” is nothing short of special. It is a reclamation of Lizzo’s identity as a rapper and soul singer. On Nov. 24, HBO Max premiered “Love, Lizzo”, a documentary that focuses on singer-songwriter Lizzo’s personal and professional growth over the course of three years. Directed by Doug Pray, the documentary tells the real story of how Melissa Jefferson, famously known as Lizzo, became a worldwide sensation and shows that her real-life and on-screen selves are exactly the same. The documentary follows the artist from her early years in Michigan, her breakthrough into the music industry, and the making of her most recent album, “Special.”

At first glance, the previews for “Love, Lizzo” made it seem like any other celebrity documentary, with throwaway comments about growing up and a few generic interviews, but it turned out to be quite the contrary. The documentary does not conceal the harsh psychological component of stardom, depicting Lizzo as a hero working to repair her inner self while still achieving a purpose.

Lizzo’s body image and rapper-to-singer pipeline have been defaced by the media. The documentary reveals her inner fortitude. It completes the gaps for individuals with a cursory perception of the singer.

Knowing what it’s like to go from being a local celebrity at her church to a rising star as an R&B singer, she has a unique perspective on development. When Lizzo is attempting to expand her purpose of inspiring others, the media portrays her as outspoken and misunderstood.

Lizzo hasn’t changed much; she’s still the same girl who may be awkward at times and sassy at others, but who always puts her musical passion first.

It offers an unfiltered view into Lizzo’s reality, and she confesses she was hesitant to release it due to the misogynistic, racist, fatphobic, and other harsh remarks she received throughout her career.

The documentary has shifted the public’s perspective of Lizzo from the fashionable and outspoken persona due to her media presence to one of being unique and driven to succeed no matter what through her raw excerpts included in the film. Now that it has been shown how hard she works for her fans and her own music, there is a whole new level of admiration for her.

Lizzo appears to stay busy in and out of the spotlight, as she produces her own music videos, creates and mixes her own songs, and explores constructing other projects outside the music industry.

The musician’s recent non-musical endeavors, such as her Fabletics shapewear collection Yitty and her Amazon Prime show “Watch Out for the Big Grrrls,” are only brief-

ly discussed in the film. It is evident that they are not incorporated as advertising, but rather to demonstrate how her other projects integrate into Lizzo’s greater objective to give an appropriate portrayal for big, Black girls—something she lacked as a child.

Like a conversation with a friend, Lizzo welcomes the audience inside her home and invites viewers into her private life, including intimate interviews from her mother, friends, and siblings.

In the documentary, Lizzo discusses her relationships with celebrities including Harry Styles and Chris Evans addressing dating speculations. The documentary seemed like an intimate glimpse into her private life as well as her public image.

The peaks of her shows and the backstage preparation are just as fascinating as the interview excerpts and film following her about in her life.

The film undoubtedly omits significant details about Lizzo’s life; she has a right to privacy, at least as much as she can control. It was much more forthright than other celebrity documentaries like “This Is It” and “Miss Americana”, however, even touching on the topic of her reconciliation with her ex-boyfriend Myke and their attempt at a second go at dating. Lizzo has been said to want an open but private relationship following social media comments on her relationships.

Hateful comments against the pop artist have been widely dissem-

inated since the release of her album, and the media has not been exceptionally kind. However, Lizzo remains unfazed by criticism, and her ultimate objective is to encourage young Black women across the globe to reach their full potential.

With self-love anthems such as “Juice” and “About Damn Time,” Lizzo’s documentary was a musical journey of her embracing herself. The documentary shows Lizzo’s path with self-love and self-discovery, and motivates future generations to be true to themselves in a world with much to say.

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Graphic Clara Faulkner

New season, new flavors: Ranking the Dunkin’ and Starbucks holiday drinks

Vani Hanamirian
Beacon Correspondent

Every winter, frenzies of people gather in Dunkin and Starbucks, waiting to get their hands on limited-time holiday flavors. In the spirit of testing both my taste buds and abilities, I sampled each company’s holiday menu and ranked them based on ultimate deliciousness, presentation and creativity—so you don’t have to.

America’s treadmill—Dunkin’—released three syrups: Brown Sugar Cookie, Peppermint Mocha, and Toasted White Chocolate. Dunkin’s signature drinks including each flavor are the brown sugar cookie cold brew, peppermint mocha latte, and toasted white chocolate latte.

Brown sugar cookie cold brew: 8.5/10
Medium \$4.85

This cold brew tastes exactly like it sounds. Although categorized as a sweet flavor, it isn’t as thick as the caramel and it is more like a syrup instead of a swirl.

The flavor itself isn’t sweet enough to stand alone in a black coffee, but collaborates well with milk.

The brown sugar cookie cold brew comes topped with a special brown sugar cold foam and cookie pieces. While the cookie pieces make the drink delicious upon first sip, they start to get soggy after 15 minutes and mix terribly with the coffee. This creates a weird texture of soggy cookie pieces and the drink itself.

Peppermint Mocha: 4/10
Medium \$4.95

Peppermint mocha is a classic holiday flavor, but Dunkin’s version has too strong of a mint flavor that doesn’t mix well with the chocolate. It also doesn’t mix well with the coffee—I ended up drinking a mouth full of coffee and with too much peppermint swirl, which was not an appetizing taste. If the peppermint and mocha mixed more evenly with the coffee, this drink would be delish.

Toasted white chocolate latte:

8/10
Medium \$4.95

The toasted white chocolate was a good choice, but could’ve been better. It reminded me of a sweeter version of Dunkin’s French vanilla flavor. It tasted like how one might imagine white mocha—a creamy white chocolate taste with just the right amount of sweetness. While you’d expect it to be a sweet flavor,

Brulée Latte, the Chestnut Praline Latte, the Peppermint Mocha, the Toasted White Chocolate Mocha, the Irish Cream Cold Brew, and the Iced Sugar Cookie Almond Milk Latte.

Caramel Brulée Latte: 8/10
Medium \$5.45

The Caramel Brulée Latte was a fantastic addition to Starbucks’ menu this year. I enjoyed the creamy

mouth with every sip, but I did still enjoy it. I gave this drink a five because it wasn’t bad, but it wasn’t anything special. While it didn’t make me gag, would I order it again? Probably not.

Peppermint Mocha: 4.5/10
Grande \$5.45

Peppermint mocha drinks require a particular taste preference, and if one does enjoy such a flavor, then

ed white chocolate mocha tastes the same, hence its deliciousness. I am unsure how adding ‘toasted’ to the name makes it different from the basic white chocolate mocha, the only difference is the sprinkles added to the top of the drink. The sprinkles do not taste like anything other than sugar and honestly take away from the drink itself because they add an unnecessary crunch. The hot version of the toasted white chocolate mocha was much better than the iced version because the flavor stood out more in the hot version.

Irish Cream Cold Brew: 4/10
Grande \$5.25

This drink is exactly what one would imagine. It isn’t anything special and has been on the Starbucks holiday menu since 2019. I enjoy the Irish Cream flavor mixed with the vanilla sweet cream, and I’d recommend it to anyone who enjoys these flavors in tandem.

Iced Sugar Cookie Almond Milk Latte: 8/10
Grande \$5.45

My friends rushed to Starbucks when the holiday drinks dropped, and several of them ranted about the sugar cookie flavor. This is the drink I was most excited to try, especially since I enjoyed the Dunkin’ one and figured the Starbucks’ version would not disappoint. This latte is very, very sweet, which is to be expected. It tastes almost like straight sugar, which can be a turn off for some, but not for me. I loved the taste and understand why my friends were eager to try it.

Overall, while I prefer Dunkin’s holiday drinks, the variety and flavors at Starbucks are far better this season. Trying these drinks opened my eyes to the differences in the two brands in terms of quality of syrups and price. Starbucks has better quality offerings but the downside is the cost can be very steep. My favorite drinks were the white chocolate mocha at Starbucks, the sugar cookie at Dunkin’ and the caramel brulée latte at Starbucks.



Illustration Rachel Choi

caramel mixing with the espresso to create a sweet-but-bitter taste. I tried this drink both hot and iced, and prefer it hot because the flavor comes through stronger without ice. This is definitely a drink I will order several more times throughout this holiday season.

Chestnut Praline Latte: 5/10
Grande \$5.45

This beverage is fine. There was no specific flavor that arose in my

they’d find it to mix well with coffee. I personally do not enjoy peppermint mocha as a flavor. It is a solid choice if you can get over the overwhelming peppermint flavor that comes with any peppermint mocha drink.

Toasted White Chocolate Mocha: 9/10
Grande \$5.45

When I worked at Starbucks, the white chocolate mocha was one of our most popular drinks. The toast-

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Sports

Five Lions Named to NEWMAC All-Sportsmanship Teams



Senior captain Oliver Glass led by example setting multiple personal records through the season. Courtesy/ Jake Smith

Jordan Pagkalinawan
Beacon Staff

Five Emerson student-athletes were named to the NEWMAC All-Sportsmanship teams on Nov. 21, highlighting players' efforts for fair and positive play.

The award recognizes athletes who "best [demonstrate] the ideals of the NEWMAC and its Code of Conduct, regardless of their overall performance or statistics for the season," according to a press release from the conference.

Oliver Glass (men's cross country), Sam Zannotti (women's cross country), Gina Lukoskie (women's soccer forward), Bo Feekins (men's soccer) and Jillian Kay (women's volleyball) represented Emerson in this year's nominees.

For Kay, the award was a recognition and validation of the little things she does to help the team, particularly since the recipients were voted in by their teammates and coaches.

"Giving my teammates high-fives, always having a smile on my face, having a positive attitude—it means the world to me to know that those little things make a difference," she said.

Transgressing through various sports, sportsmanship is displayed in multiple forms. Glass, who is a three-year senior captain, said the quality holds major significance.

"Cross country is a sport where people take sportsmanship very seriously," he said. "It always feels good to be recognized as someone who is a strong sportsman and takes pride in the value of good, fair competition."

Although statistics are not taken into account for the awards, Zannotti has led the way for the women's cross country team—placing highest out of the eight runners at the NCAA Division III Regionals.

"To be chosen out of a small number of girls, it does mean a lot, because it means what I put into it, I'm getting out of it," she said.

Lukoskie, commonly known by her teammates as "Spicy," played a pivotal role in the women's soccer team's success whether starting or making an impact off the bench.

"It shows that my teammates notice the respect I have [for them] as well as for my opponents and other coaches we play," Lukoskie said.

Feekins helped lead the men's soccer team to historic heights and in his career has played clean in defense, only tallying three yellow cards in 46 games in his career.

The Lions named to the All-Sportsmanship Teams were each part of successful squads. The women's volleyball team earned plenty of high distinctions, including an 18-5 regular season and being ranked third in their region—the highest in Emerson's history. Women's soccer took home the program's first NEWMAC championship after a 12-4-5 season.

Men's soccer achieved a 10-3-6 overall record and made it to the NEWMAC Championship where they fell to Babson. Lastly, both men's and women's cross country teams finished 19th and 28th in regionals, respectively, with several individual accomplishments along the way.

Kay, Glass, and Lukoskie all chose to focus on how their teams contributed to their own successes. "We look at all of our triumphs as a team, and none of it would be possible without each other," Kay said.

Glass was proud of how the runners came together to build a family environment that led to high performances at meets.

Zannotti recalled winning the Runnin' Monks Invitational with a time of 25:57 as a personal triumph for her, especially after she sprained her ankle there last season.

"I crossed the finish line and immediately turned to find coach [Brandon] Fox running next to me ... for me to come back and do better than I thought I was going to do, that was huge," she added.

The sophomore Zannotti was the lone underclassman representing Emerson in the NEWMAC teams All-Sportsmanship teams.

"It's an honor ... I look up to those ahead of me and what they do in terms of sportsmanship and leadership," she said. "So to be seen in the same light as them makes me excited for the next two years," she said.

Each player remarked that team bonding away from the game stood out as fond memories and a key part of the Emerson experience.

"Spending quality time with the team that we had worked so hard with, it was an opportunity to reflect on what we've done

and what we've built," Glass said about a team trip to Maine. "We were the Most Improved Team in the NEWMAC this year."

"Every day is a fun day. Practicing, hanging out with teammates and going out to dinner after games—all the team bonding outside of the games. We definitely have good team chemistry. The team culture we built is definitely a fun part, besides winning," Lukoskie said.

Kay recalled the tight bond the volleyball team shared.

"That's something I had never really experienced until I got to Emerson," Kay said. "That team bond where we love each other on and off the court ... My volleyball career is over, and I wouldn't have wanted to spend it anywhere else."

Reflecting on their careers as Lions, Kay and Glass pointed to the juniors and seniors who led the way for them as freshmen, showing them the ropes of being a student-athlete.

"They really set the example of what it's like to be an Emerson Lion and to play for each other," Kay said.

Of all the lessons Kay learned throughout her time at Emerson, perseverance is the one she will carry with her beyond college.

"We were the underdogs in a lot of situations, but we were able to come out on top," Kay said. "The lessons I've learned have just been to be kind to other people, always play your game, and support other people along the way."

Athletics provides many teaching moments throughout a season, and Glass noted how the skills he learned as a leader are just as applicable to other aspects of life.

"Having the privilege of being on this team as a member and as a captain teaches me a lot of lessons on teamwork and how to operate as a group," Glass said.

For Zannotti, being recognized for her sportsmanship has motivated her to establish a new foundation for next year.

"I want things to be different," she said. "I just kind of want everyone to cheer for each other, push each other and create a really positive space because it's such a small team."

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Soccer seniors say goodbye

Cont. from Pg. 1

He's also a team player," said sophomore midfielder Hugo Berville, who shares a class with Biathrow.

"He's always there for the team," Berville said. "For example, he got an injury mid-season and even though he had difficulties [moving], he came to our games and even came to practices." That was really nice of him."

Bo Feekins - Defense

Standing tall in the Lions' backline, Feekins was a reliable defender who contributed to the success of a team that prided itself on its defense. Allowing just 0.94 goals per game, the Lions allowed half the number of goals they scored throughout the season—and Feekins was key to the backend's success. Toulson said this year Feekins—who is part of the team's leadership group—developed into a more vocal captain.

"[When] you talk about guys that give inspirational speeches—he's a guy people look to in the locker room in terms of motivation," Toulson said. "We ask a lot from our leadership group and he's one that's done so much. He was one of the leaders that organized our work with Grassroots Soccer that ended up raising \$7,500 for at-risk youth around the world."

Defensively, Feekins was solid, but like Biathrow, he didn't light up the scoresheet. He scored just once in his career, but it was an important one—the game-tying goal in double-overtime of the Lions' NEWMAC Semifinals matchup against MIT, a game the Lions would eventually win. Berville said the goal sent an explosive charge through the team.

"[Whenever] we scored I was really happy," he said. "But when he scored against MIT, it was like I scored—it was like we all scored. This only goal was an amazing memory we'll always have."

Aidan Ferguson - Midfielder

Ferguson, another one of the team's leadership group, was a standout one of the team's best players, earning First Team All-Conference honors at season's end. He tallied four career points as a defensive midfielder, a position first-year midfielder Gabe Rich said he excelled in.

"He's a center defensive mid," Rich said. "It's one of the most taxing positions because you have to handle a lot of pressure on the offensive side. He's probably the hardest worker on our team. At half time, his lips will be white because he's been running so much."

As a member of the Lions' leadership group, Ferguson was relied on for more than what he contributed on the field. Toulson said Ferguson was highly focused on his play, an attitude that was infectious.

"His mentality and his work ethic has gotten him to where he is," Toulson said. "Every day in the offseason he's in the gym, getting touches on the ball, really diligent. Aidan's definitely a leader by example—there's other guys on the team that are jokesters and guys that are bigger on the speeches. Aidan's a guy that knows how to get things done and still be lighthearted."

Ferguson plans on returning to Emerson for graduate school so he can continue to play for the Lions.

Phil Han - Forward

Han, who was brought in as a center back but transitioned to the forward position, leads his graduating class with six career goals.

Toulson said despite initially recruiting Han for a defensive role, his precise shooting served as an impetus to shift him up the field.

"He has the technical quality," he said. "A guy you want in front of the goal all the time because he's really accurate with his shooting."

Toulson added that Han's commitment to team success was inspiring—despite not being a part of the formal leadership group, Han developed into a role model.

"He started to help the strikers on the team," Toulson said. "One of the things that set him apart this year, he seemed to be bought into the group. One of those guys that helped younger players see, this is how you need to act. Every session he came to, he was working the hardest I've ever seen him work."

Nathan Yarborough - Forward

Walking on to the team two years ago, Yarborough earned a spot, according to Toulson, due to his strong work ethic. Since then he's worked his way into 11 of the team's games as a supplementary forward option. He scored his only career goal in the Lions' Nov. 20 victory over Lesley University, helping the team capture its eighth Charles River Cup. Berville said he'll remember Yarborough's constant drive to improve.

"He's always there in practices with a great level of intensity," he said. "It's important to have players like this. For him, what I saw is that he's never satisfied with himself. He always wants to get better."

Rich said Yarborough was hard on himself, but was also one of the most uplifting players to work with.

"Nate's been probably the most positive guy on our team this year," Rich said. "I think in that sense, he's been a big part of the product of our team. It's positive reinforcement from his words, high-fives, [and] keeping people on a high note."

Class of 2023

The 2022 Lions may not have won the NEWMAC Championship they were aiming for, but they still had a successful season, led by a group of seniors that Rich said were willing to do whatever it took to improve.

"They dealt with a ton of rough, losing seasons," Rich said. "[They had] a chip on their shoulders, the energy and resilience to go this far after having so many demoralizing seasons. Early in the summer when we were doing our fitness tests, some people weren't really on top of it at times, and [the seniors] wanted no excuses, they didn't want to have any regrets."

Berville noted that the team will miss the leadership presence, whether each senior was a formal captain or not.

"Just great leaders," he said of the seniors. "For example, Phil doesn't talk as much as Bo and Fergie because they're the captains, they were always leading by example, I think that's the most important thing for younger guys. They [showed] what has to be done and what we have to follow. They fought for this team and made it the team it is today."

Though Ferguson has stated he plans on returning next fall, most of the seniors will be saying farewell to the men's soccer team. But their legacy, one marked by a historic playoff run, and of noteworthy leadership, will remain.

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